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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000929

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SUBJECT: CZECHS SUPPORT U.S. POSITION ON KOSOVO

REF: STATE 109526

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Michael Dodman for reasons  
1.5 b+d

¶1. (C) Summary: The Czech position on Kosovo remains strongly supportive of U.S. and Contact Group thinking. The Czech MFA supports the upcoming round of talks between Belgrade and Pristina, but remains skeptical a mutual agreement will be reached. The MFA predicts the Czechs would recognize a unilateral declaration of Kosovo independence, but fears that such a move will be a severe blow for EU CFSP. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Pol-Econ Counselor delivered reftel demarche on Aug 8 to Czech MFA Director for Eastern and Southern Europe Tomas Szunyog. Szunyog welcomed details on the U.S. position, and quickly agreed that the Czech view was largely in line with the U.S. Specifically, Szunyog offered the following thoughts:

- the Czechs are disappointed that Russia has not engaged effectively on the Ahtisaari plan, and that both Belgrade and Pristina are resistant to further compromise;
- the Czechs do not predict success in the upcoming four months of talks, but nonetheless support a renewed effort to reach an agreed compromise (and to bring Moscow on board);
- that said, Szunyog sees little room for improvement over the Ahtisaari plan, since offering any additional protections or guarantees to the Kosovar Serbs risks giving them so much autonomy that it would effectively split Kosovo.

¶3. (C) Szunyog expressed some concern about setting December as the termination for the negotiation effort. His main concern is that it may be hard to win a more flexible Russian approach in the run up to the Russian presidential election. But he also pointed to numerous other events in and around December that may make it harder to seal a deal, including:

- the potential for a declaration of some sort by Pristina on Nov 28,
- campaigns for Serbian presidential and municipal elections in 2008,
- the early December deadline for Russian withdrawal from CFE, and
- potentially a new UNSC Resolution on Iran late in the year.

¶4. (C) Szunyog also reviewed dynamics within the EU and the likely Czech stance. He said the Czechs had not yet decided how they will approach Kosovo within the EU, but expect this will be a major topic at the September Gymnich meeting. While they will certainly express support for the coming negotiations, they have not decided how active to be in raising the question of what to do if those talks fail. Szunyog predicted the stance of the French and UK on this will drive the debate within the EU, in part because the Portuguese presidency is not likely to play a strong role. Regardless of how the internal debate progresses in the coming months, the Czech MFA is sure that there will be no unified EU stance in the event that talks fail and Kosovo declares independence without a UNSCR. In this case, Szunyog

said, the Czechs will likely recognize the declaration, but probably "would not be either the first or the last EU member to do so." He expects a group of six member states with minority concerns (Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia) to prevent any EU position in favor; they would likely find support from Germany and others concerned about legal questions but also the impact of such a move on Russian-EU relations. This would produce a "crisis" for CFSP, and would call into question the planned EU takeover of UNMIK responsibilities, as well as participation of some states in KFOR.

15. (C) The Czechs have a relatively large presence in KFOR, and intend to maintain this deployment regardless of the direction taken by status talks. One concern is that the Czechs are currently part of a joint Czech-Slovak brigade, and the Czechs expect the Slovaks would pull their troops if there is a unilateral declaration.

16. (C) Szunyog said the Czechs are aware that supporting a unilateral declaration carries risks, but on balance it is in Czech interest. The major risk Szunyog sees is that Russia could follow through on threats to support Abkhazia's independence, leading to possible integration into Russia. Domestically there are also risks. The opposition CSSD has been vocal in opposing independence. While Kosovo is not a strong domestic issue, the Czech government has other reasons for not wanting to antagonize CSSD -- primarily because it may need their support to win approval for the missile defense agreement with the U.S., which should go to Parliament for approval late this year or early in 2008. Szunyog admitted he is not involved in discussions on missile defense, but his overall assessment is that Czech support for Kosovo's independence would not become a significant domestic

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political issue.

17. (SBU) Finally, Szunyog offered some details on planned Czech diplomatic representation in the region. The GOOCR is planning to upgrade and expand its presence in Pristina. Currently they have one mid-level diplomat, co-located with the Slovaks. The Czechs intend to send a "senior diplomat" this fall, to be supported by two officers, and located separate from the Slovaks. They have not determined how this new Liaison Office will function. Currently Belgrade supports the single Czech diplomat, but Szunyog would prefer to see this office supported by Skopje. The Czechs also want to upgrade their representation in Skopje, creating a full embassy later this year, but budget planning for that continues.

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